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WOMAN PLEADS GUILTY TO PREPARING FALSE TAX RETURNS

Baltimore, Maryland - Thomas M. DiBiagio, United States Attorney for the District of Maryland, announced that Margaret Elizabeth Benbow, age 53, of Idabell, Oklahoma, formerly of Timonium, Maryland, pled guilty today before U.S. District Court Judge Catherine C. Blake to a criminal information charging her with conspiracy to defraud the United States with respect to claiming non-existent itemized expenses on tax returns of at least \$78,773 .

The criminal information alleges that from about January 1999 until December 2000, Benbow, a/k/a MZ BIDDY, owned a tax preparation company known as MZBC, Inc. in Towson, Maryland. As the owner/manager of MZBC, Inc, Benbow charged clients \$100 to prepare their tax returns or amended tax returns. While doing so, she falsely portrayed herself to clients as a former employee of the Internal Revenue Service (in fact, Ms. Benbow is a retired egg inspector for the State of Maryland, Department of Agriculture), knowingly claimed non-existent itemized deductions and filed the false tax returns or caused the returns to be filed with the United States and the Internal Revenue Service. To conceal her activities, Benbow did not disclose her part in

the preparation of these false tax returns; rather, the false tax returns were identified as “self-prepared.”

Benbow faces a maximum sentence of 10 years imprisonment followed by 3 years of supervised release and a fine of \$250,000. As part of her plea agreement, Ms. Benbow has forfeited approximately \$30,000.

Judge Blake scheduled her sentencing for January 9, 2004.

The case was investigated by Internal Revenue Service - Criminal Investigation and prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Steven H. Levin.